

Understanding a Conceptual Framework of Spa Service Quality: An Overview Approach

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Due to the inadequate literature for fully understanding service quality in the spa industry, this article has the objective to review the related literature to obtain a conceptual understanding of a spa service quality framework. The method is based on a systematic review of related literature by analysing service models/dimensions from past studies and integrating them to obtain a comprehensive framework of spa service quality. Based on the proposed framework, the four themes (dimensions) of spa service quality are identified: (1) spa programmes and products, (2) physical environment, (3) customer-employee interaction, and (4) service outcome. The overview suggests that using a single service model is insufficient to fully understand the spa service quality framework because of its distinct characteristics. The findings can help researchers and spa practitioners to thoroughly understand the overall framework of spa service quality. In particular, the combination of physical environment (technology-based equipment) and better customer-employee interaction can contribute to service innovation for the spa industry. The overview helps to extend the theoretical knowledge (framework) of the traditional SERVQUAL and three-dimensional models (physical, interaction and outcome quality) by adding the product dimension as an additional component of the spa service quality framework.

Keywords: spa service quality, spa industry, spa services, wellness tourism



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Introduction

The spa industry has been gaining in popularity worldwide over the past decades due to the increasing health-awareness of people who seek a better quality of life, the expansion of spa businesses, the growth of wellness tourism, and reasonable prices of services (Han et al., 2017; Sangpikul, 2022a). Generally, spas offer water-based facilities and a wide range of services for health, relaxation and skin beauty (Hashemi et al., 2015). As spas are related to people's health and well-being, many countries are promoting spas as one of the wellness tourism sectors to respond to the global trend as well as to attract more international tourists to increase tourism revenue (Han et al., 2017; Sangpikul, 2022a). Many tourists may spend their free time

at destinations to visit spa establishments to experience spa services in a relaxing environment (Hashemi et al., 2015; Tsai et al., 2012).

Being one of the service-oriented businesses, the spa industry is heavily focused on employee performance to provide customers with personalised services and spa experiences (Lo et al., 2015; Tsai et al., 2012). Customers generally perceive the quality of spa services through employees' abilities to provide the services that meet their expectations (Lo et al., 2015; Sangpikul, 2019). To deliver the services as customers expect, this mainly concerns 'service quality,' which is customers' comparison of service expectations and performances (Parasuraman et al., 1985). A company providing a high level of service quality is likely to de-

liver the services that meet customer needs and create service satisfaction (Gonzalez & Brea, 2005; Lo et al., 2015).

Given the importance of service quality to the success of spa businesses, there is still inadequate literature to fully understand it within the spa industry, as evidenced by the following arguments. First, many spa studies have examined customer satisfaction and spa service quality through the SERVQUAL model with its five well-known dimensions, namely, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles (e.g. Bakirtzoglou et al., 2018; Lo et al., 2015; Loke et al., 2018; Vryoni et al., 2017). However, SERVQUAL has been criticised for some weaknesses which prevent it from being fully applicable to a specific service sector as it seems to focus on service process rather than the overall service quality assessment (Ali, 2015; Wu & Ko, 2013). Several scholars argue that SERVQUAL is a generic service quality instrument rather than a specific one for each business category due to its original development within the finance and banking industry (Kurtulumusoglu & Pakdil, 2017; Lo et al., 2015). Consequently, the adoption of SERVQUAL to measure spa service quality may be insufficient to thoroughly understand various distinct attributes of spa services due to different settings (Choi et al., 2015; Lagrosen & Lagrosen, 2016). This may reflect some weaknesses in the existing literature regarding spa service quality.

Second, given the weaknesses of SERVQUAL, there have been several studies attempting to adopt several models or approaches to measure spa service quality in different contexts (e.g. Choi et al., 2015; Clemes et al., 2020; Tsai et al., 2012). However, these past studies seem to provide an incomplete understanding of overall spa service quality due to the lack of certain important service dimensions. For example, in studies of Choi et al. (2015) and Tsai et al. (2012), responsiveness and employee courtesy were omitted, while assurance and empathy were not included in Clemes et al.'s (2020) study. Likewise, responsiveness and service outcomes were omitted in Albayrak, Caber, and Oz's (2017) study. It is understandable that each study may have its own purpose, scope, and research design to examine spa service quality in different settings with well explained results. However, in terms of literature

overview and knowledge advancement, this may affect or limit spa practitioners' opportunities to fully understand their customers' expectations and perceptions of overall spa service quality. This may require further study to fully understand the overall framework of spa service quality.

Third, during the past decades, there have been a number of spa-related studies providing different views or methods regarding spa service quality based on international perspectives (e.g. Albayrak et al., 2017; Bakirtzoglou et al., 2018; Chieochankitkan & Sukpatch, 2014; Choi et al., 2015; Clemes et al., 2020; Gonzalez & Brea, 2005; Lagrosen & Lagrosen, 2016; Lo et al., 2015; Loke et al., 2018; Sangpikul, 2019; Snoj & Mumel, 2002; Tsai et al., 2012; Vryoni et al., 2017). An overview of these studies may provide useful insights or implications to better understand spa service quality within various contexts. Past studies conducting systematic reviews in tourism and hospitality provide useful implications for the tourism and hospitality literature such as the syntheses of knowledge, research framework development, critical discussions, future research directions, and the useful practical implications for hospitality and tourism businesses (Hardy et al., 2002; Pahlevan-Sharifa et al., 2019; Shiwen et al., 2022). In the same way, an overview of spa service quality will provide such contributions.

In terms of spa practitioners, service quality is an important instrument for them to better understand how well a delivered service meets customer expectations (Parasuraman et al., 1988). A thorough understanding of service quality can assist spa practitioners in delivering better services to meet customer expectations, thereby contributing to customer satisfaction, word-of-mouth communication, and repeat visits (Lo et al., 2015; Sangpikul, 2022c). However, based on the gaps in the literature as earlier mentioned, there is still a lack of integrated knowledge to assist spa managers to thoroughly understand customers' needs and expectations for overall spa quality. In particular, research discloses that spa customers generally have different health-related needs/concerns, various service motivations and diverse service preferences (Tsai et al., 2012; Sangpikul, 2022c). This suggests that spa managers are required to have a well-rounded knowledge

about overall elements of spa service quality to better deliver the services that meet a wide range of customers' needs, preferences and expectations in order to maximise customer satisfaction.

In order to fill the gaps in the literature and enhance a thorough understanding of overall spa service quality, this research note has the objective to analyse and overview the related literature regarding spa service quality within various contexts to provide knowledge advancement and appropriate implementations in the spa industry. The overview approach will yield a greater picture and in-depth understanding of the overall spa service quality framework, helping to strengthen knowledge development in the field. In addition, the study will also assist spa managers to fully understand what customers may expect from spa services, and further develop the services to meet their needs and expectations, thereby enhancing customer satisfaction and repeat patronage (Sangpikul, 2019).

Literature Review

Service Quality

In the service literature, an early measurement of service quality was proposed by Gronroos (1984), who conceptualised service quality as a two-dimensional construct: technical and functional quality. Technical quality refers to service outcome, or what customers actually receive from the service, while functional quality refers to the process of service delivery. Expanding Gronroos's model, the concept of service quality based on customer expectations and perceptions was developed by Parasuraman et al. (1985), who originally identified ten service dimensions, and later reduced the overlapping dimensions to five dimensions: reliability, assurance, responsiveness, empathy, and tangibles. These five dimensions have been widely known as SERVQUAL.

In addition to SERVQUAL, Brady and Cronin (2001) identified three structural dimensions of service quality: physical, interaction and outcome quality. Each has its sub-dimension that defines the basis of service quality perceptions. They argued that the combination of all three dimensions (and sub-dimensions) constituted a customer's overall perception of the quality of service. Given the existing service models, SERVQUAL

seems to have gained wide adoption in various service sectors, including the hospitality and tourism industry, due to its generic quality assessment tool with the five different dimensions (Snoj & Mumel, 2002; Lo et al., 2015; Sangpikul, 2019). However, it has often been criticised for its weaknesses in several aspects, particularly the lack of specific coverage for service quality assessment in a particular business category (Ali, 2015; Kurtulmusoglu & Pakdil, 2017), including the spa industry. To fully understand the literature of spa service quality, past studies are reviewed in the next section.

Studies of Spa Service Quality

This section aims to review and analyse the existing models of spa service quality based on various settings. Given a number of related studies, they may be classified into two groups, as shown in Table 1. The first group is the studies employing SERVQUAL (i.e. Bakirtzoglou et al., 2018; Gonzalez & Brea, 2005; Lo et al., 2015; Loke et al., 2018; Vryoni et al., 2017). Despite the usefulness of SERVQUAL, scholars have criticised certain weaknesses of it, as mentioned earlier. This argument is also true in the spa industry. For example, certain attributes of spa service quality were not included in past studies, such as product attribute (e.g. Bakirtzoglou et al., 2018; Sangpikul, 2019; Vryoni et al., 2017) and service outcome (e.g. Gonzalez & Brea, 2005; Lo et al. 2015; Loke et al., 2018). Product element can be regarded as one of the important attributes in spa service quality as customers can perceive it and be exposed to different spa programme experiences (Lagrosen & Lagrosen, 2016; Tsai et al., 2012). Likewise, service outcome is another important attribute of spa service quality because it is what customers actually expect to receive after the treatments (Choi et al., 2015; Clemen et al., 2020).

Another set of studies (second group) employed modified dimensions (different service models) to examine spa service quality (e.g. Albayrak et al., 2017; Clemen et al., 2020; Choi et al., 2015; Lagrosen & Lagrosen, 2016; Tsai et al., 2012). Tsai et al. (2012), for example, used five service dimensions to understand male consumers' perceived performance of Hong Kong Hotel spas, namely: environment, service experience, augmented service quality, value, and relia-

Table 1 Literature Analysis and Overview of Research Gaps

Studies	Authors	Dimensions	Country of studies	Overview of research gaps
Studies employing SERVQUAL	Bakirtzoglou et al. (2018); Lo et al. (2015); Loke et al. (2018); Snoj & Mumel (2002); Sangpikul (2019); Vryoni et al. (2017)	SERVQUAL dimensions: Reliability, assurance, responsiveness, empathy, tangibles	China, Greece, Slovenia, and Thailand	All studies lack certain attributes of spa service quality (e.g. product and outcome attributes).
Studies employing modified models	Albayrak et al. (2017); Choi et al. (2015); Clemes et al. (2020); Lagrosen and Lagrosen (2016); Tsai et al. (2012)	Tangibility, competence & courtesy, credibility & safety. Spa facility, spa programme, staff, uniqueness. Interpersonal quality, environmental quality, administrative quality, technical quality. Process dimension, outcome dimension, specific quality dimension. Environment, service experience, augmented services, value, reliability.	Turkey, Korea, Thailand, Sweden, and China (Hong Kong)	Most studies lack certain important attributes (e.g. responsiveness, empathy, or assurance).

bility. Choi et al. (2015) employed four quality dimensions (spa facility, spa programmes, staff, and uniqueness) to examine the relationships between spa service quality, perceived value, satisfactions, and behavioural intentions. Assessing what attributes of spa and wellness service quality affect customer satisfaction in Antalya's hotels (Turkey), Albayrak et al. (2017) used tangibles, credibility and safety, and competence and courtesy dimensions to understand the factors affecting overall customer satisfaction.

For the second group, although there are various service models being employed to examine spa service quality, these studies still lack certain essential components or dimensions, as earlier mentioned. For instance, responsiveness and employee courtesy were omitted in studies of Choi et al. (2015) and Tsai et al. (2012), while assurance and empathy were not included in Clemes et al.'s (2020) study, and responsiveness as well as service outcome were omitted in Albayrak et al.'s (2017) study.

Following the above analysis, it is understandable that researchers may have different research objectives and frameworks to examine spa service quality from different perspectives. However, in terms of an academic overview, the existing literature seems to be inadequate and may limit the capacity of researchers and

spa practitioners to fully understand spa service quality. Importantly, spa practitioners may lack the opportunities to deliver the better services to meet or satisfy customer needs due to the incomplete service assessment. Given the gaps in the literature, it is important for scholars to seek for a better approach to fill them, and to strengthen knowledge development in the field.

Method

In order to review the related literature regarding spa service quality, Google Scholar was employed as a main source of information. A number of studies used Google Scholar for review studies (e.g. Chan & Hsu, 2016; Law et al., 2009). Google Scholar is the world's leading search engine, which indexes scholarly articles from different databases (Law et al., 2009). A preliminary survey found that a number of spa-related studies were indexed in various databases, not limited to only Scopus or a particular database. Google Scholar, therefore, seems to be an appropriate source of information as it has combined a lot of scholarly articles from various databases.

In this study, a systematic review approach from past studies was adopted and modified to provide reliable data collection and analysis, for example, setting selection criteria, article search, screening data,

article eligibility, information record, and the analysis/synthesis of the findings/reviews (Gomezelj, 2016; Pahlevan-Sharifa et al., 2019).

This approach was adopted and modified as follows:

- Key words used to search for the data were determined, for example, 'spa service quality,' 'spa service,' 'day spa and service quality,' 'hotel spa and service quality.'
- To search for the target articles, only English full-text articles (from the year 2000 onwards) were included in the analysis. A preliminary survey indicated that studies related to spa services quality have been documented from the year 2000 onwards. In particular, it may be noted that during the years 2010–2020, studies in regard to spa service quality received much attention from international scholars.
- The screening was conducted to search for the studies related to spa service quality. An initial survey found around 42 related studies; however, the researcher had determined article eligibility to choose only the relevant studies for final analysis.
- To determine article eligibility, a qualified article had to contain the details of spa service quality, including (1) service models (e.g. SERVQUAL or other modified models), (2) service dimensions (e.g. reliability, assurance, responsiveness), and (3) measurement items being used. These criteria help to fully understand spa service quality and to further develop an appropriate overall framework.
- Given such eligibility, a total of 25 studies were included in the final analysis. Key information of an article was recorded accordingly (e.g. title, journal name, year of publication, methods, models of service quality, service dimensions, measurement items, and key findings).
- During data analysis, an individual study was reviewed, and later it was combined with other studies to form ideas/concepts regarding spa service quality, and finally, all studies were integrated and synthesised to develop a framework.

In addition to a systematic review approach, content analysis was employed to supplement data analysis (e.g. reviewing past studies) and to group the findings, as it is appropriate for a systematic coding and categorising method used for analysing textual information (Stemler, 2001). It was used to analyse and group the data regarding spa service quality (including service dimensions and items) from past studies. Later, similar concepts of spa service quality were grouped into each construct and, finally, they were integrated to form a framework of overall spa service quality. In this study, a proposed framework was reviewed by two scholars and two spa managers to determine its appropriateness and implementations. Some corrections were made in regard to grouping of service items and clarity of wording. Data were collected during June 2022.

Findings and Discussion

Identifying Themes and Framework of Spa Service Quality

To present the findings, the studies related to spa service quality have been reviewed, analysed and integrated to obtain the comprehensive understanding of the spa service quality framework as shown in Table 2. Consequently, the four themes (dimensions) of spa service quality are identified, namely, (1) spa programmes and products, (2) tangibles and physical environment, (3) customer-employee interaction, and (4) service outcome. Each theme is presented and discussed as follows:

Dimension 1: Spa Programmes and Products

Spa programmes and products are established as the first theme of the spa service quality framework. This theme may be called 'product dimension' because it is a starting point, or the first stage at which customers expect to receive spa experiences. In an international context, there are a variety of spa service providers such as day spas, club spas, mineral spring spas, and resort and hotel spas. These spa service providers may offer different or a variety of spa programmes and products to correspond to customer needs and preferences. According to Table 2, several past studies employ some product attributes in their studies to exam-

Table 2 Identifying Themes and Framework of Spa Service Quality

Categories	Literature	Themes and framework
Dimension 1 Product & service attributes	Dimension 1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choices/varieties of spa programs (Choi et al., 2015; Clemes et al., 2020). • Quality of spa products (in-house and retail) (Choi et al., 2015; Tsai et al., 2012). • Availability of spa retail products (Sangpikul, 2019; Tsai et al., 2012). • Availability of augmented/complimentary services (Sangpikul, 2019; Tsai et al., 2012). • Food & beverage services (Bakirtzoglou et al., 2018; Vryoni et al., 2017). • Product specialty/uniqueness (Choi et al., 2015). 	Dimension 1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spa programs & products • Choices/varieties of spa programs and facilities • Quality of in-house and retail products • Availability of retail products • Augmented or complimentary services (including food & beverage services) • Product specialty
Dimension 2 2.1 Tangibles 2.2 Physical assurance	Dimension 2 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decoration, atmosphere, and environment (Bakirtzoglou et al., 2018; Clemes et al., 2020; Lo et al., 2015; Tsai et al., 2012; Vryoni et al., 2017) • Availability of facilities/equipment (Albayrak et al., 2017; Bakirtzoglou et al., 2018; Lo et al., 2015) • Employee appearance (Snoj & Mumel, 2002) • Quality & maintenance of facilities/equipment (Bakirtzoglou et al., 2018; Clemes et al., 2020; Lo et al., 2015; Tsai et al., 2012) • Cleanliness & hygiene (venue, facilities) (Lo et al., 2015; Loke et al., 2018) • Customer security & safety (Albayrak et al., 2017; Sangpikul, 2019) • Customer privacy (Lo et al., 2015; Sangpikul, 2019) 	Dimension 2 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tangibles & physical environment • Decoration, atmosphere, and environment • Appearance of facilities/equipment • Employee appearance • Quality & maintenance of facilities/equipment • Hygiene & cleanliness (physical assurance) • Customer security & safety • Customer privacy

Continued on the next page

ine customer perceptions of spa service quality, for example, product variety (Choi et al., 2015; Clemes et al., 2020), quality of spa products (Choi et al., 2015; Tsai et al., 2012), availability of spa retail products (Sangpikul, 2019; Tsai et al., 2012), augmented or complimentary services (Sangpikul, 2019; Tsai et al., 2012), and product specialty (Choi et al., 2015). However, the in-depth analysis indicates that most studies merely measure spa product attributes based on a few items, not the dimension or construct. Measuring only a few items may not reveal the complete picture in regard to spa product attributes. Based on the existing literature, there are several product attribute items associated with this theme. These items are argued to be appropriate and sufficient to be established as the product dimension with its relevant items. This suggests that

product dimension is important, and it should be incorporated as one of the spa service quality framework themes. Future research may employ the items in the product dimension to further understand customer perceptions of spa programmes and products in order to deliver the services that meet their needs and expectations.

In addition, research indicates that a variety of spa services available to customers can enhance their enjoyment and satisfaction (Lagrosen & Lagrosen, 2016). A thorough understanding of the product dimension may help spa practitioners to better understand how customers perceive and evaluate their product attributes. Researchers may employ the product dimension as a part of the spa service quality framework to examine its relationships with other key variables

Table 2 Continued from the previous page

Categories	Literature	Themes and framework
Dimension 3	Dimension 3	Dimension 3
3.1 Reliability	• Reliability (Albayrak et al., 2017; Clemes et al., 2020; Lo et al., 2015)	• Customer & employee interaction
3.2 Empathy	• Empathy (Lo et al., 2015; Vryoni et al., 2017)	• Reliability (e.g. knowledge, expertise, performance of promised services, services without mistake)
3.3 Responsiveness	• Responsiveness (Clemes et al., 2020; Lo et al., 2015; Vryoni et al., 2017)	• Empathy (e.g. caring services, personalized services, understanding customers)
3.4 Assurance	• Customer service assurance	• Responsiveness (e.g. willingness to help customers, provision of prompt services)
3.5 Courtesy & friendliness	(Chieochankitkan & Sukpatch, 2014; Sangpikul, 2019)	• Assurance (e.g. customer confidence/trust in customer services)
3.6 Communication	• Courtesy & friendliness (Albayrak et al., 2017; Clemes et al., 2020)	• Courtesy & friendliness
	• Communication (Clemes et al., 2020; Sangpikul, 2019)	• Communication
Dimension 4	Dimension 4	Dimension 4
Outcome	• Physical effect (Lagrosen & Lagrosen, 2016)	• Service outcome
	• Mental effect (Lagrosen & Lagrosen, 2016)	• Physical outcome
		• Mental outcome

such as perceived value, satisfaction, and behavioural intention.

Dimension 2: Tangibles and Physical Environment

Tangibles and physical environment are identified as the second theme of the spa service quality framework. Based on the literature, this dimension involves two sub-themes: (1) tangibles, and (2) physical assurance. Tangibles here refer to the SERVQUAL context. According to Parasuraman et al. (1988), tangibles involve the physical surroundings, facilities, and amenities provided in service venues. In the spa setting, when customers are in spa venues, they will be exposed to various aspects of spa tangibles/environment (e.g. beautiful decoration, spa equipment, and treatment rooms). Following Table 2, there are a number of studies which include tangibles as a part of spa service quality. They examined customer perceptions in regard to, for example, spa decoration, atmosphere, and environment (Bakirtzoglou et al., 2018; Clemes et al., 2020; Lo et al., 2015), availability of facilities and equipment (Albayrak et al., 2017; Bakirtzoglou et al., 2018; Lo et al., 2015), and employee appearance (Snoj & Mumel, 2002). Importantly, tangibles are argued to be an important element of spa service quality as they

have an impact on customer satisfaction and emotions in hotel spas (Lo et al., 2015; Sangpikul, 2022a). More research may be needed to further examine the influences of tangibles on customer perceptions and satisfaction in other spa categories to extend the literature.

In addition, physical assurance is also identified and included in this dimension because it is associated with the physical environment, which can inspire customer trust and confidence when using spa services, based on Parasuraman et al. (1988). Physical assurances identified from the literature are, for example, quality and maintenance of facilities/equipment (Bakirtzoglou et al., 2018; Clemes et al., 2020), cleanliness and hygiene (Lo et al., 2015; Loke et al., 2018), customer security and safety (Albayrak et al., 2017; Sangpikul, 2019), and customer privacy (Lo et al., 2015; Sangpikul, 2019). According to the literature, they are the service attributes that can enhance customer confidence during service delivery. Past studies reveal that certain attributes of physical assurance may have impacts on customer satisfaction and repeat consumption. For example, customers experiencing unclean spa venues, poor hygiene standards or lack of service privacy may have negative experiences of spa establishments and may not return to

patronise them (Sangpikul, 2019). However, there are still limited studies that specifically examine the role of physical assurance in customer satisfaction, emotions and loyalty in the spa industry. Understanding these relationships may contribute to better service improvement. Furthermore, a recent study (a qualitative method) indicates that perceived hygiene related to physical assurance (e.g. cleanliness and hygiene of spa venues, facilities, equipment) becomes an important factor associated with customer satisfaction and decision making in using spa services during the COVID-19 situation (Sangpikul, 2022b). Quantitative approaches may be appropriate to further examine these relationships to better understand the role of perceived hygiene in the spa industry.

Dimension 3: Customer-Employee Interaction

Customer-employee interaction is established as a third element of the spa service quality framework. This theme is important as it has been integrated based on various SERVQUAL attributes (e.g. reliability, empathy, responsiveness, assurance, courtesy and friendliness, and communication). These attributes are similar to most of the 10 original dimensions as identified by Parasuraman et al. (1985). This suggests that the key elements of spa service quality are closely related to SERVQUAL dimensions. This theme is thus called customer-employee interaction because all service attributes are mainly related to the interaction between employees and customers. For example, when delivering spa services, customers expect to meet courteous and friendly spa employees who provide them with prompt services. They also expect professional spa services from skilful therapists who provide them with personalized services that meet customer expectations. During the delivery of services, employees and customers communicate with each other until the completion of the services. All of these attributes are inseparable characteristics of the hospitality industry, including the spa industry, because employees and customers cannot be separated during the delivery of services (Sangpikul, 2022a). Consequently, all service attributes under this theme play important roles during service delivery because they involve interaction between spa employees and customers. With a num-

ber of related studies in regard to customer-employee interaction in the spa industry (e.g. Albayrak et al., 2017; Bakirtzoglou et al., 2018; Clemes et al., 2020; Gonzalez & Brea, 2005; Lo et al., 2015; Sangpikul, 2019; Vryoni et al., 2017), the review of literature indicates that knowledge about customer-employee interaction in the spa industry is well documented.

However, there is still research room for this dimension, for example, spa service experiences and the experience-based economy. As addressed, the spa industry is related to the experience-based economy because customers go to spas to experience the services related to their health benefits. During the customer-employee interaction, the delivery of spa services may lead to the experience-based economy in terms of customers' service enjoyment, customers' personal fulfilment, and customer memory. Thus, there is still room to explore further in this area, for example, the factors of spa services contributing to customers' service enjoyment.

Dimension 4: Service Outcome

Service outcome is identified as the last theme. Service outcome generally refers to what customers receive after their service consumption (Brady & Joseph, 2001; Gronroos, 1984). In the spa setting, this dimension relates to the outcome of spa services or what customers feel after the completion of spa services, for example, relaxation, stress-related relief or skin beauty. Past studies indicate that customers go to spas for specific purposes, and expect to experience a spa service outcome, either physical outcome (effect) or mental outcome (effect) (Lagrosen & Lagrosen, 2016). They may not go to spas if they do not receive the expected service outcome. Service outcome, therefore, is an essential part of spa service quality for a company to understand customer judgments about the overall spa experiences and satisfaction. Service outcome as identified in the current study may have a similar concept to functional quality as defined by Gronroos (1984). According to Gronroos, functional quality is related to what customers receive after the services, which is usually perceived or interpreted in a subjective way. In this regard, functional quality may support the nature or characteristic of spa service outcome as customers

may interpret it differently and subjectively regarding mental outcome (e.g. relaxation, stress relief) and/or physical outcome (e.g. skin beauty).

Moreover, the review of literature indicates that there is very limited knowledge about spa service outcome in the international context. Among a few studies, Tsai et al. (2012), for example, employ only one item of spa service outcome (relaxation) in their study to measure customer perceptions of spa services in Hong Kong's hotels, whereas Clemes et al. (2020) employ a modified model with technical and functional quality constructs (with the outcome dimension) in their framework. However, their methods and findings seem to provide very limited information to fully understand spa service outcome due to the lack of attribute items and its measurement.

In addition, the review of literature indicates that service outcome, as defined by Gronroos (1984) and Brady and Joseph (2001), has not been thoroughly examined in the spa industry due to the inadequate literature about it. This suggests that a complete picture in regard to service outcome in the spa industry has not yet been obtained.

Importantly, service outcome may be regarded as a distinct variable as it can be employed either as an independent or dependent variable in the quantitative studies (like satisfaction variable). Past studies reveal that service outcome (as an independent variable) can impact customer satisfaction and loyalty in certain service industries. For example, Hsieh and Hiang (2004) find a positive effect of service outcome on customer satisfaction across two types of service businesses (i.e. banks and hospitals), while Choi and Kim (2013) indicate similar findings in hospital services. In addition, Murti, Deshpande, and Srivastava (2013) find that other independent variables can affect service outcome (as a dependent variable) in health-care services. Based on the related literature, this suggests that service outcome plays an important role in health-related industries, and requires further studies to specifically examine it in the spa industry to extend the literature.

Table 3 has summarised and compared the current findings with past literature to obtain a better understanding of overall spa service quality. The overview

approach helps to extend a better understanding of spa service quality models as adopted from Parasuraman et al. (1988) (*SERVQUAL*) and from Brady and Cronin (2001) (three-dimensional model) by adding a product dimension (spa programmes and products) as a part of the spa service quality framework. According to Table 3, following Parasuraman et al. (1988), all service dimensions of *SERVQUAL* are associated with 2 constructs (elements): (1) service process, and (2) tangibles, but no product dimension. In contrast, Brady and Cronin (2001) have proposed a three-dimensional model with 3 constructs: (1) interaction quality element, (2) physical environment quality, and (3) outcome quality, but no product dimension as well. However, the current study has surveyed the existing literature (including the two models), and has integrated them into 4 constructs: (1) employee-customer interaction, (2) tangibles and physical environment, (3) service outcome, and (4) spa programmes and products. In particular, spa programmes and products have been additionally identified as a part of overall spa service quality, given its relevance as earlier discussed. The four constructs being identified are expected to help spa practitioners to fully understand customers' expectations and perceptions of overall spa service quality, and to make appropriate service assessment.

Conclusion and Implications

Conclusion

The overview of related literature has provided the conceptual understanding of the spa service quality framework as shown in Table 3. All four dimensions and their sub-dimensions are well supported by the existing literature and were reviewed by scholars and spa experts. Based on the analysis of literature, it seems that most international researchers are likely to employ dimension 2 (physical environment) and dimension 3 (customer-employee interaction) in their studies (e.g. Bakirtzoglou et al., 2018; Lo et al., 2015; Loke et al., 2018) to examine spa service quality (see Table 1) because these dimensions are related to *SERVQUAL*, the well-known service model in the hospitality and tourism industry. However, *SERVQUAL* has some weaknesses, as earlier discussed (focusing

Table 3 Comparison of Major Service Models and Spa Service Quality Framework

SERVQUAL Parasuraman et al. (1988)	Three-dimensional model Brady and Cronin (2001)	Spa service quality framework (current study: an overview approach)
Service process (i.e. reliability, empathy, responsiveness, assurance)	Interaction quality (i.e. reliability, empathy, responsiveness, assurance)	Employee-customer interaction (i.e. reliability, empathy, responsiveness, assurance)
Tangibles (i.e. tangibles)	Physical environment quality (i.e. tangibles)	Tangibles & physical environment (i.e. tangibles, physical assurance)
-	Outcome quality (i.e. service outcome)	Service outcome (i.e. mental & physical outcome)
-	-	Spa programmes & products (i.e. spa treatments, product specialty)

on service process). Meanwhile, there are several studies employing other modified models, including the three-dimensional model, which still lack certain service dimensions (i.e. product and outcome dimensions).

Theoretical Implications

First, due to the scarcity of research to fully understand service quality in the spa industry, this article has provided a conceptual understanding of the service quality framework for the spa industry. Based on the overview of related literature, the four themes (dimensions) of the spa service quality framework are identified: (1) spa programmes, (2) physical environment, (3) customer-employee interaction, and (4) service outcome. This conceptual framework helps to extend the theoretical knowledge and understanding of the traditional three-dimensional model (physical, interaction and outcome quality) defined by Brady and Cronin (2001) by proposing the product dimension (spa programmes) as the additional component of the spa service quality framework based on the current literature. According to Brady and Cronin, customers perceive the quality of services through three structural dimensions: physical, interaction and outcome quality. However, their model lacks the product dimension due to the examination of different service industries, not the wellness industry (health-related services). Consequently, this article has extended the service literature in regard to the product dimension, specifically for the spa industry. Future quantitative

studies are suggested to verify this conceptual framework.

Second, the findings from Table 2 may provide a better approach to thoroughly understand the spa service quality framework when compared to the SERVQUAL model, which mainly focuses on customer-employee interaction or service process but lacks product and outcome dimensions as earlier discussed. In this regard, the current findings help to explain why SERVQUAL is not fully applicable to measure service quality in the spa industry due to the lack of certain service dimensions.

Third, regarding the product dimension (spa programmes), past studies merely measure them based on individual items, not a dimension or a construct, as addressed. However, this article has overviewed a number of product attribute items from the existing literature and has combined them in order to propose the product dimension (spa programmes and products). Adding the product dimension in the spa service quality framework may provide interesting or different findings from what has been documented in the literature due to the distinct characteristics of the spa industry.

Fourth, in regard to service outcome, this dimension helps to better understand the term 'service outcome' in the spa industry because there is limited literature to fully understand it. According to Gronroos (1984) and Brady and Cronin (2001), service outcome (technical quality/outcome quality) is generally defined as what customers expect to receive after the

completion of the services. In this regard, the current overview has further explained the characteristics of service outcome in the spa industry in terms of mental and physical outcome. In other words, what spa customers expect to receive after the spa treatments is mental and/or physical outcome (benefit). Research indicates that service outcome is an important factor associated with customer satisfaction (Lagrosen & Lagrosen, 2016; Sangpikul, 2022a). Thus, it is appropriate to establish service outcome as an essential part of spa service quality, thereby rounding out the limited literature about service outcome in the spa industry. In addition, the service outcome dimension may help to generate new findings in the quantitative studies as it may be added or modified as an independent or a dependent variable in the quantitative methods due to its special features (such as satisfaction). Past studies indicate that service outcome (independent variable) can impact customer satisfaction and loyalty in certain service industries, for example, banks and hospitals (Choi & Kim, 2013; Hsieh & Hiang, 2004), whereas Murti et al. (2013) find that other independent variables can affect service outcome (dependent variable) in healthcare services. However, there is a lack of such studies to further examine the impacts of service outcome in the spa context. This is an important clue for future studies to add or modify service outcome as the dependent or independent variable (when appropriate) in the quantitative studies to yield new findings and extend the spa literature.

Finally, all elements of the proposed framework may provide implications for future studies in regard to service quality experience and the experience-based economy in the spa industry. The spa industry is argued to be one of the major experience-based economy sectors in the tourism industry (Lo et al. 2015; Sangpikul, 2022b) because it sells 'experiences' in terms of a variety of spa programmes (1st element) in a beautiful and relaxing environment (2nd element) through professional customer services (3rd element) in order to provide customers with the expected service outcome (4th element). This suggests that all elements of the proposed framework contribute to the experience-based economy, and require further investigation about their relationships.

Managerial Implications

There are several managerial implications for spa practitioners to implement the proposed framework (dimensions and measurement items) to be applicable to various spa categories and business strategies to better understand their customer perceptions and expectations of overall spa services. The following recommendations/implications are made on each service dimension and are based on past literature in regard to the implementation of spa service quality.

For product dimension, the product attributes being identified may help spa managers to fully understand how customers perceive/evaluate their services/products as well as to obtain more information from customer perspectives (Choi et al., 2015; Clemes et al., 2020). The information obtained from the product dimension may contribute to service development as well as to develop a company's marketing strategies or competition purposes such as product specialty, product positioning or product differentiation (Choi et al., 2015; Ekinci, 2002).

In regard to the physical dimension, past research indicates that the characteristics of the physical environment of spa venues play an important role in enhancing customer experiences and satisfaction (Lo et al., 2015; Tsai et al., 2012; Vryoni et al., 2017). Lo et al. (2015), for example, reveal that the spa environment has a positive impact on customer emotions. Similarly, Tsai et al. (2012) indicate that the physical environment contributes to the attractiveness of the spa venue and customer satisfaction. Given the tangibles and physical environment dimension, spa managers may better understand what customers expect concerning this dimension, and also learn what attributes should be assessed to better satisfy customers, for example, spa atmosphere, venue decoration, quality of facilities, and customer privacy (Bakirtzoglou et al., 2018; Clemes et al., 2020; Lo et al., 2015).

For customer-employee interaction, this is the most important element of spa service quality, as indicated from past studies, because *SERVQUAL* belongs to this dimension. Research shows that almost all *SERVQUAL* dimensions, being examined in various settings, had significant influence on customer satisfactions, emotions and loyalty (Clemes et al., 2020; Lo et al., 2015).

Spa managers can obtain useful information by using the items in the framework to better understand how well their employees deliver the expected services. In particular, the sub-dimensions like reliability, empathy, and responsiveness are often found to be the important determinant factors contributing to customer satisfaction and loyalty (Bakirtzoglou et al., 2018; Lo et al., 2015). This suggests that spa managers need to pay attention to the development of spa employees, who are the crucial factor to deliver spa services to meet customer expectations. Staff training and supervisory monitoring can help to develop their employees in order to provide better spa services and experiences for customers (Lo et al., 2015).

As for outcome dimension, this is an important element of spa service quality. Customers expect to experience the service outcome either physically or mentally (Lagrosen & Lagrosen, 2016). However, it seems that many spa service providers may overlook evaluating this element by focusing on service process rather than the outcome results due to insufficient literature. The current findings may assist them to better understand spa service outcome for future appropriate implementations. As mentioned, research indicates that service outcome is a significant factor influencing customer satisfaction, emotions, and subsequent behaviour in the service industries (Choi & Kim, 2013; Hsieh & Hiang, 2004). This suggests that the understanding of customer perceptions on service outcome may help spa managers to do appropriate marketing to target those who seek these outcome benefits (Choi et al., 2015; Lagrosen & Lagrosen, 2016).

Finally, understanding of certain service dimensions may help to generate service innovation in the spa industry, particularly the combination of physical environment (technology-based equipment) and better customer-employee interaction (Sangpikul, 2022c). For example, training professional employees by using high-tech equipment or facilities may help to generate service differentiation or innovation as perceived by customers since these services may lead to product competitive advantages (strength of the business). Skin beauty treatments may be a good example of product differentiation/innovation in the spa industry by delivering excellent customer service together

with a high-tech facility to provide customers with the expected service outcome.

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